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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [CHIEF](#)

SUBJECT: PANAMA PLEDGES SUPPORT ON NICARAGUA

Classified By: Ambassador William Eaton for reasons 1.4 (b)&(d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: On September 29, Panamanian President Torrijos told WHA DAS Fisk and Ambassador Eaton that he shares our concerns about developments in Nicaragua and urged the U.S. to maintain a broad range of contacts and channels with the entire spectrum of Nicaraguan political parties and players. During a follow-on meeting, Foreign Minister Lewis reaffirmed Panama's commitment to seek an indictment of former Nicaraguan President Aleman in Panamanian courts for corruption. He pressed the U.S. to pursue similar legal action in the United States and pledged full continued GOP cooperation with any U.S. investigators or judicial process against the former President. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) During a breakfast meeting September 29, Panamanian President Torrijos expressed his government's concerns about political developments in Nicaragua and their possible destabilizing impact on the region. He urged the United States to maintain a broad range of contacts across the entire political spectrum in Nicaragua. We cannot write off a generation of young radicals, including the Sandinistas, who might later potentially be national leaders and future partners with the U.S., he said. The lack of such sustained contacts in the past with some elements of his party, the PRD, made it more difficult for him today to manage the elements that the U.S. had shunned and, as a result, are now nervous about his pro-US policies and philosophy. Lewis, following the meeting with Torrijos, privately acknowledged GOP frustration with its outreach efforts to Daniel Ortega and the elements of the FSLN loyal to him. The Foreign Minister, while echoing Torrijos's general statement on the need to engage the FSLN and the need for a genuinely democratic left in Nicaragua, conceded that that would not emerge through Ortega.

3. (C) In a separate meeting, WHA DAS Dan Fisk and Ambassador Eaton briefed Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis on the Deputy Secretary's upcoming trip to the region and urged Panama to press for an indictment of former Nicaraguan President Aleman for money laundering in Panama. Lewis committed to seek an indictment but pointed out that, under the Panamanian Constitution, the responsibility for issuing indictments rests with the Attorney General, not the executive branch. Nevertheless, he pledged to push hard but discreetly to energize Attorney General action on the case. He pointed out that similarly bold legal action in the United States would send a powerful message to Aleman, his family and also the Nicaraguan people. Lewis also reaffirmed GOP interest in cooperating with U.S. law enforcement and prosecutors in the Aleman case. He said that the GOP remains willing to share information and evidence with DOJ and U.S. attorneys. Lewis also clearly conveyed his view that GOP is waiting for the U.S. to show more vigor in pursuing a case against Aleman.

4. (C) Comment: Lewis Navarro may not have been aware that a judge has agreed to hold a 23 November preliminary hearing where the government's attorney will present the government's case and the defense given a chance to respond. At this point the judge decides whether to proceed or dismiss the case. If the judge decides to proceed, other hearings would follow. Embassy is looking into the judge's past record, given corruption problems with the Panamanian court system. Both Torrijos and Lewis were very interested in Deputy Secretary Zoellick's upcoming visit to the region and want to be helpful in supporting democracy and stability in Nicaragua.  
EATON